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At the CIA, It Looks Like Time for Another Wholesale Turnover

TRANSITION NOTES

A wholesale turnover — the second in four years — is looking increasingly likely at the top levels of the Central Intelligence Agency. The reason, according to sources close to the transition effort, is to get the nation's top analyzer of intelligence to start turning out analyses more in tune with the Ronald Reagan philosophy.

Several transition officials with an interest in the agency are known to believe that the CIA has made numerous errors in the past in analyzing the information supplied to it through the nation's intelligence-gathering apparatus — "inexcusable mistakes," is how one official described them.

And there was little effort to hide that belief from the people now working at CIA. Asked if there was any tension between the transition team and CIA employees, one official replied, "Sure, lots of it."

Other transition officials disagree with that assessment — or at least suggest that the tension was all in the heads of the CIA employees. One transition official said the CIA team, headed by J. William Middendorf, was greeted with "all these rumors of purges and hit lists."

"But I never saw any," the official said, and he added that the team "made it quite clear that they were there to identify issues." He dismissed reports to the contrary as efforts by some in the "so-called intelligence lobby" to "poison the well."

Nevertheless, some CIA employees were nervous from the start when they saw who was slated to handle the transition chores in the agency — among them Angelo Codevilla, a key staffer on the Senate's Select Committee on Intelligence, who helped formulate the conservative Heritage Foundation's recent report to the president-elect. That 3,000-page report reportedly came down hard on the performance of the intelligence community.

So the folks at CIA are finding little comfort now in the dismissal of their fears as having "no basis in fact."

In the words of one official close to the CIA team: "Those reports aren't written by phantoms."

— Cass Peterson